

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 PANAMA 03478 171944Z

ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 /056 W

-----180521Z 045621 /14

R 162205Z MAY 77

FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1923

INFO USCINCSO

PANCANAL

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, MILI, PN

SUBJECT: END OF NATIONAL GUARD OPERATION "OH, WHAT FEAR"

REF: PANAMA 3212

1. NATIONAL GUARD (GN) OPERATION "OH, WHAT FEAR" ENDED MAY 13 WITH A SPLASH OF PUBLICITY, WITHOUT UNTOWARD INCIDENTS AND WITH NO MAJOR FOUL-UPS. THE FINAL WAS A NOONTIME PARADE OF TROOPS, TRUCKS AND TEN V-150 ARMORED CARS DOWN THE CITY'S CENTRAL AVENUE. LARGE CROWDS OF ONLOOKERS WERE SILENT BUT NOT SULLEN. PARADE WAS REVIEWED BY GENERAL STAFF, FOREIGN MINISTER AND OTHER GOP DIGNITARIES, BUT REPORT THAT TORRIJOS WOULD APPEAR AND ADDRESS THE TROOPS PROVED UNFOUNDED.

2. MAY 13 PRESS CONTINUED TO GIVE HEAVY COVERAGE, INCLUDING FULL-PAGE SPREADS OF PICTURES OF GN IN MARTIAL ARRAY OR ENGAGED IN CIVIC ACTION PROJECTS. A PUBLISHED MESSAGE FROM TORRIJOS PRAISED THE TROOPS AND THE OPERATION AND SAID IT PROVED THAT GN,  
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PAGE 02 PANAMA 03478 171944Z

IN COOPERATION WITH PANAMANIAN PEOPLE, WAS FULLY CAPABLE OF DEFENDING THE CANAL BY ITSELF. OTHER (UNSPECIFIED) TROOPS WITH THIS MISSION COULD BE BETTER UTILIZED ELSEWHERE. COMMENTARY ALL WEEK HAS CHANTED PRAISES OF GN IN GENERAL AND THIS EXERCISE IN PARTICULAR, WHICH GOP-OWNED RADIO LIBERTAD CAST AS "...A REPLY

TO U.S. MILITARY PROVOCATIONS AS WELL AS A TOTAL  
CONFIRMATION OF OUR SOVEREIGNTY."

3. GN CARRIED OUT THE OPERATION WITHOUT MAJOR FOUL-UPS,  
CONSIDERING ITS STATE OF DEVELOPMENT, FACT THAT THIS  
IS THE FIRST TIME IT HAS SOUGHT TO MOUNT THIS SCALE  
AND TYPE OF TRAINING OPERATION, AND SHORTNESS OF  
NOTICE ON WHICH IT WAS ORGANIZED. GN EVIDENTLY MADE  
A CONSCIOUS EFFORT TO EXECUTE THIS ON ITS OWN. IN  
CONTRAST TO PRIOR OPERATIONS, THERE WAS NO FLURRY OF  
LAST-MINUTE REQUESTS (EXCEPT SINGLE REQUEST LAST  
WEEK FOR AID IN HELICOPTER MAINTENANCE) FOR ASSISTANCE  
FROM U.S. MILITARY. PRESS COVERAGE DURING WEEK  
HAS MANAGED TO INCLUDE PHOTOS OF TORRIJOS AND VIRTUALLY  
EVERY ONE OF THE GENERAL STAFF WITH THE OPERATION.  
MILGROUP OBSERVES WITHIN GN, AND PARTICULARLY AMONG  
PARTICIPANTS IN OPERATION, A SENSE OF SOME PRIDE THAT  
IT WENT WELL.

4. GN MADE A CONSCIOUS EFFORT TO KEEP U.S. AUTHORITIES  
IN CANAL ZONE, THROUGH MILGROUP, INFORMED ON PROGRESS  
AND PLANS FOR THE OPERATION. USSOUTHCOM WAS EQUALLY  
COOPERATIVE. LARGELY BECAUSE OF THIS, THERE WERE NO  
PROBLEMS BETWEEN GN UNITS AND U.S. TROOPS HOLDING  
EXERCISES IN CANAL ZONE ADJACENT TO GN OPERATIONS  
AREA. SOME GN OFFICERS WERE QUOTED IN MEDIA AS  
CHARGING THAT U.S. MILITARY AIRCRAFT HAD OVERFLOWN  
OPERATION TO SPY ON IT, BUT THIS CHARGE HAS NOT BEEN  
REPEATED.

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PAGE 03 PANAMA 03478 171944Z

5. EMBASSY HAS HEARD THAT AN  
AMERICAN RESIDENTS OF  
CANAL ZONE WHO DROVE A CAR INTO THE GN OPERATION AREA  
WERE DETAINED BY GN ON MAY 10 AND NOT RELEASED UNTIL  
MAY 12. REPORTEDLY, THEY HAD FIREARMS. THEIR  
VEHICLE IS SAID TO HAVE BEEN KEPT BY GN AFTER THEIR  
RELEASE.

6. COMMENT: FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE GUARD'S  
MORALE, THE OPERATION APPEARS TO HAVE HAD A CERTAIN  
VALUE. THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS ARE  
HARDER TO MEASURE. THE OPERATION WAS CLEARLY A  
PART OF THE ESTABLISHED GOP POLICY OF HARRASSING  
AND PUTTING PRESSURE ON THE U.S. IN THE CANAL  
NEGOTIATIONS.

A FEW RADIO COMMENTATORS HAVE HINTED THAT THE GUARD

LOOKS A BIT RIDICULOUS IN SEEMING TO IMPLY THAT IT  
IS SOMEHOW A MILITARY MATCH FOR THE GRINGOS. THE

MORE SOPHISTICATED THE OBSERVER, THE MORE LIKELY  
HE IS TO TAKE THIS VIEW. MANY PANAMANIAN WITH  
LITTLE  
LOVE FOR THE PRESENT REGIME LOOK UPON THIS SHOW OF  
MILITARY PREPAREDNESS AS AIMED PRIMARILY AT PANAMANIAN,  
NOT AMERICANS. OTHERS PROBABLY VIEW THE OPERATION  
WITH A MEASURE OF RESPECT IN THAT THE GN WAS ABLE TO  
GET THROUGH THE OPERATION WITH ITS DIGNITY INTACT.  
GONZA  
EZ

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## Message Attributes

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**Capture Date:** 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am  
**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
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**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
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**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 22 May 2009  
**Disposition Event:**  
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**Original Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
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**TAGS:** PFOR, MILI, PN  
**To:** STATE  
**Type:** TE  
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**Review Markings:**  
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